

# NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

**United States Congress**

**Massachusetts Seventh District**

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## **MARKEY URGES DOE TO SPEED UP RECOVERY OF RADIOACTIVE SOURCES**

**Washington, D.C.-** Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce and Homeland Security Committees, today released a letter to Spencer Abraham, Secretary of the Department of Energy (DOE), requesting information regarding DOE's efforts to secure radioactive materials both here in the U.S. and abroad. Unsecured radioactive materials pose a serious threat to homeland security because they could be used to construct a homemade nuclear weapon or dirty bomb.

"Left unsecured, these materials are a ticking bomb, waiting for Al-Qaeda or some other terrorist group to find them. The only way to make sure terrorists do not get radioactive materials is recover and secure them," said Rep. Markey, adding "DOE needs to be more aggressive in its efforts to prevent terrorists from getting access to these nuclear materials."

Last October, *Time* magazine reported that an Al-Qaeda operative captured in Pakistan claimed that Al-Qaeda wants to move nuclear materials into Mexico and then smuggle them across our southern border to attack us. And in Germany two suspected Al-Qaeda were arrested last month where they were reportedly trying to buy uranium to build a dirty bomb. Recently, Massachusetts officials were informed of a reported threat to the City of Boston involving suspects who might have access to nuclear materials. Even though this particular claim proved to be a hoax, there are plenty of materials available both abroad and within U.S. borders that could be used by terrorists if we do not take the proper steps to fully secure them.

Large numbers of radioactive sources such as cesium-137, strontium-90 and plutonium-239 are commonly used for medical, industrial and educational purposes in the U.S. The U.S. also sent plutonium-239 and highly enriched uranium (HEU), fuel for research reactors, abroad as part of the Atoms for Peace program in the 1950s and 1960s. The high costs of disposing of these materials properly serves to deter some owners of unwanted sources from doing so both domestically and abroad, and in many cases, the U.S. failed to provide for the sources' return when providing them to other countries. As a result, many sources remain unwanted, unsecured, and in some cases, abandoned. For example, 170 plutonium-239 sources were sent overseas to countries like Iran and Pakistan.

The DOE is charged with collecting unwanted radioactive sealed sources in the U.S. and U.S.-origin HEU from abroad. The DOE also provides funds to facilitate the return of Russian-origin HEU back to Russia. Several different Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports point to major problems in DOE's efforts to secure radioactive materials, including low priority, inadequate resources, and the slow pace of recovery.

In 2003 DOE proposed to cut the Off-Site Source Recovery (OSR) Program, a program that focused on collecting orphan radioactive sealed sources. Rep. Markey spoke out against the program's elimination and sent a letter on August 27, 2003 to DOE expressing concern that the elimination of this program would leave over one thousand radioactive sources unsecured. DOE revised its plans and decided against eliminating this vital program.

The letter released by Rep. Markey today requested information related to:

- Plutonium-239 sources sent overseas, including a complete inventory of where the sources were sent, the date on and location where the sources were last verified, and plans to recover these sources.
- Highly enriched uranium (HEU) fuel, including a list of countries with U.S.-origin and Russian-origin HEU and what DOE is doing to create incentives for nations to return used or unused fuel.
- The number of unwanted sealed radioactive sources in the U.S., including what steps DOE is taking to increase the number of recovered unwanted sources and what steps DOE is taking to construct a permanent storage facility for long-term recovery efforts.

A copy of the Markey letter is attached. For additional information related to the Congressman's work on nuclear security, please see [www.house.gov/markey](http://www.house.gov/markey)